

Name: Randall C. Nichols, Superintendent

Organization: Eldora-New Providence Community School District

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Bio highlights: 34 years as an educator in Iowa, 21 years as a school administrator

Key facts you will stress: 1) Background of District's 4-Year Old Preschool Program, 2)

Required Staffing Levels, 3) Costs of Staffing Levels to Program Funding, & 4) Funding Needed to Maintain Quality Program.

Opening Statement by Randall C. Nichols, Superintendent, Eldora-New Providence Community School District, Eldora, Iowa:

Thank you, Senator Schoenjahn and other members of the Senate Education Appropriations Sub-Committee, for allowing us to address you this afternoon regarding funding for the Statewide Voluntary 4-Year Old Preschool Program. I am Randall C. Nichols, Superintendent of the Eldora-New Providence Community School District. With me this afternoon is Mrs. Karen Ritter, who is the Director and Teacher of the Good Shepherd Preschool in Eldora, a faith-based partner in our District's 4-Year Old Preschool Program.

While the main focus of our presentation is on the need for adequate funding to continue to provide a quality preschool program, I would like to start by providing some background regarding the Voluntary 4-Year Old Preschool Program in the Eldora-New Providence Community School District. We have just finished our second year of participation in the Statewide Voluntary 4-Year Old Preschool Program. As you know, the first year of participation in the program was funded by the Preschool Grant and all subsequent years of participation are funded through the school foundation formula with a weighting formula that provides funding per student enrolled at the equivalent of 0.6 of a K-12 student.

The preschool program in the Eldora-New Providence District has from its inception been a cooperative program involving participation of our faith-based partner, Good Shepherd Preschool, the District's special education preschool program, and the District's Voluntary 4-Year Old preschool program. In addition, there has been collaboration with the Head Start Program in Eldora. The teachers and para-educators from the different component parts work closely together and attend the same training and professional development activities. This collaborative work enabled the District to successfully meet all of the required standards and 97% of the additional standards during its verification site visit this past February.

Part of the requirements of the Statewide Voluntary Preschool Program is a maximum student to teacher ratio of 10 to 1 with a maximum of 20 students per classroom. Such limits are in place to assure the quality of the instructional experiences for each student in the program.

After the first year start-up costs involving supplies and equipment, nearly 98% of all expenses in the District's Preschool Program are for staff salaries and benefits. In order to meet the quality standards for the Statewide Preschool Program, we respectfully request that the current funding level be maintained. It will be very difficult for us to provide the program with less funding and continue to meet the quality standards. We recognize that the Legislature has a

difficult task of balancing the State's budget with a great many of divergent needs. However, without adequate funding, maintaining the level of quality in the preschool program will be impossible simply due to the staffing required, let alone the other instructional standards in code and regulation. Schools will certainly be part of the budget solution. If a reduction in preschool funding becomes part of this solution, we would respectfully submit that anything less than a weighting of 0.5 per student would cause significant change in the quality of the program. Certainly, because we are committed to early childhood education, we would do all we can to trim expenses in order to continue to provide a quality preschool program at the lower 0.5 weighting level.

Mrs. Ritter will speak more about the value of the quality standards and their impact on our District's preschool program.

Thank you.

Name: Karen Ritter

Organization: Good Shepherd Preschool, collaborating with ENPCSD for the 4-Year-Old Voluntary Program

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Bio highlights: I have taught at Good Shepherd for 26 years. I have an elementary teaching degree and received my early childhood endorsement in 2009.

Key facts you will stress: I feel that the 4-Year-Old Voluntary Program has enabled a good program at Good Shepherd Preschool to become an excellent program. Because of the rigorous requirements that are needed to meet the Iowa Quality Preschool Program Standards, we have increased the quality and quantity of time that preschoolers spend at Good Shepherd. Before the grant we had 4 year-olds for 7.5 hours per week. Now we have them for 12 hours a week. Before the grant we did not use a highly recognized Curriculum. We now use Creative Curriculum as the core of our instruction. Before the grant we used check lists for assessment and now we use the comprehensive on-line Creative Curriculum assessment system. This has enabled us to individualize assessment for the children in our care. We are able to change our lesson plans because of the assessment process to help students develop needed skills. One item that has increased tremendously with the grant is that all of my staff has been able to be trained in the Creative Curriculum; Every Child Reads; and Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports. When we were verified for the QPPS in Feb. we were able to meet all of the required criteria and 97% of the rest of the criteria. This was in part due to the collaboration that ENP and Good Shepherd were able to accomplish by creating a team that worked together. This would not have been possible without the funding provided for the State Voluntary Program.